



**U.S. Department of Justice**  
Office of Information Policy  
Suite 11050  
1425 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20530-0001

---

Telephone: (202) 514-3642

Emma Best  
MuckRock News  
DEPT MR 59796  
411A Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02144-2516  
[59796-66257998@requests.muckrock.com](mailto:59796-66257998@requests.muckrock.com)

Re: Appeal No. DOJ-AP-2019-001058  
Request No. 1414545  
SRO:JNW

**VIA: Email**

Dear Emma Best:

You appealed from the action of the Federal Bureau of Investigation on your Freedom of Information Act request for access to records concerning Thomas Hofeller. I note that your appeal concerns the adequacy of the FBI's search. Please note that this Office was closed due to a lapse in funding appropriations between December 22, 2018 and January 25, 2019, which resulted in a delay in responding to your appeal.

After carefully considering your appeal, I am affirming the FBI's action on your request. The FBI informed you that it could locate no responsive records subject to the FOIA in its files. Please be advised that the FBI conducted a search of its automated indices, SENTINEL, and manual index cards for both main files and reference files. I have determined that the FBI's response was correct and that it conducted an adequate, reasonable search for such records.

To the extent that your request seeks access to records that would either confirm or deny an individual's placement on any government watch list, the FBI properly refused to confirm or deny the existence of any such records because their existence is protected from disclosure pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(7)(E). Exemption 7(E) concerns records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes the release of which would disclose techniques and procedures or guidelines for law enforcement investigations or prosecutions. Further, it is reasonably foreseeable that confirming or denying an individual's placement on any government watch list would harm the interests protected by this exemption. *See, e.g., Kalu v. IRS*, 159 F. Supp. 3d 16, 23 (D.D.C. 2016). This response should not be taken as an indication that records do or do not exist. Rather, this is the standard response made by the FBI.

Please be advised that this Office's decision was made only after a full review of this matter. Your appeal was assigned to an attorney with this Office who thoroughly reviewed and analyzed your appeal, your underlying request, and the action of the FBI in response to your request.

If you are dissatisfied with my action on your appeal, the FOIA permits you to file a lawsuit in federal district court in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B).

For your information, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) offers mediation services to resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. Using OGIS services does not affect your right to pursue litigation. The contact information for OGIS is as follows: Office of Government Information Services, National Archives and Records Administration, Room 2510, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, Maryland 20740-6001; email at [ogis@nara.gov](mailto:ogis@nara.gov); telephone at 202-741-5770; toll free at 1-877-684-6448; or facsimile at 202-741-5769. If you have any questions regarding the action this Office has taken on your appeal, you may contact this Office's FOIA Public Liaison for your appeal. Specifically, you may speak with the undersigned agency official by calling (202) 514-3642.

Sincerely,

3/15/2019

X 

---

Sean R. O'Neill

Chief, Administrative Appeals Staff

Signed by: SEAN O'NEILL